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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000069

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SUBJECT: POLITBURO COMMISSIONS STUDIES ON POLITICAL REFORM

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Classified By: Pol/C Marc Knapper for Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Vietnam's 14-member Politburo has tasked a little-known group of intellectuals and former and current Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders to examine Vietnam's (and other countries') political systems and recommend possible political reforms in accordance with Vietnam's "political realities, traditions and capabilities." According to a member of this group, it has recommended that the Party dismantle some CPV institutions that oversee government policy and overlap with GVN agencies. The group has also called on the Party to "allow more space for civil society." While it is impossible to tell how much stock Party leadership puts in this group's recommendations, at a minimum the Politburo appears to be discussing whether and to what extent to pursue political reform. The outcome of the upcoming CPV Central Committee Plenum -- which will reportedly discuss in depth the Party's role in Vietnam -- may give some further indication about Party thinking in this regard. End Summary.

Advising the Power Brokers

¶2. (C) During a recent meeting with Poloff, Dr. Vu Minh Giang, Vice President of Hanoi National University, reported that Vietnam's 14-member Politburo assigned a little-known group of intellectuals and current and former Party leaders known as "Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi 10" (KX-10, or "Social Science 10") to undertake studies on further political reform ("Doi Moi") in accordance with the nation's "political realities, traditions and capabilities." Giang is a member of this committee. Out of "professional obligation," Giang could not reveal all of the components of the group's program; however, he said KX-10's findings are presented before important CPV meetings. Tran Dinh Hoan, a former Politburo member and former head of the Party's Personnel Commission, presents KX-10's study results and recommendations directly to the Politburo.

¶3. (C) According to Giang, since its inception in late 2004, KX-10 has examined Vietnam's political system and offered comments on its strengths and weaknesses and the "practical situation" faced by officials, cadres and public servants. The group has considered the Party's role in Vietnam's political system as a whole and debated what should be done to enhance this role and strengthen the overall system. KX-10 has also studied strengthening the roles of the judiciary, National Assembly and civil society, Giang said.

Learning From Other Countries' Experiences

14. (C) Giang stated that KX-10 sends delegations abroad to study foreign political experiences and traditions. For example, in meetings with Japanese academic experts, lawyers and politicians, the group discussed how the Liberal Democratic Party has remained steadily in power for many years. The conclusion that KX-10 drew from those and other discussions was that a multi-party system is not essential for democracy, Giang declared. (Note: Japanese Embassy counterparts have told us that KX-10 members specifically asked about LDP factions and how factionalism can be an alternative to a multi-party system. One member of KX-10 even asked about managing a "soft-landing" from a one-party to a multi-party system, according to our Japanese contacts. End Note.)

15. (C) KX-10 delegations also studied civil society's role in Sweden and Norway, one-party rule in China and political traditions in Germany. Asked whether China has served as the main model for Hanoi's management of political and economic transitions, Giang stated that "Vietnam is not copying a particular model, but instead is bringing into play the advantages of its traditional culture and political institutions."

KX-10 Behind Some Changes in Party Statutes

16. (C) Giang asserted that, in April 2006, the Party incorporated recommendations from KX-10's first round of studies into the 10th Party Congress documents addressing the long-standing question of "whom does the Communist Party represent?" Traditionally, the Party represented the working class. However, KX-10 argued that because the CPV did not originate from class warfare -- but instead from "the need to liberate the country" -- it has always been open to those who shared this overarching goal. KX-10 thus successfully recommended that 10th Party Congress documents reflect that

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the CPV represents the nation, not just the working class. Related to this, Vietnam's Central Committee agreed during the Congress to allow Party members to establish companies or do business "in accordance with relevant laws," Giang stated.

(Note: When this change was announced, it was greeted more as an acknowledgement of reality rather than a major repudiation of Marxist-Leninist ideology. End Note.)

Reducing Party Influence?

17. (C) KX-10 also concluded that Vietnam's political system "is bulky and inefficient, with too much overlap between the Party and the Government," Giang continued. KX-10 has recommended that the Party rationalize its organizational structure and put the management of ministries, agencies and organizations completely under the Government's, not the CPV's, purview. As part of this effort, the Party should eliminate all of its committees except for the Personnel Commission, the Commission for Ideology and Culture, the Inspectorate Commission, the Internal Affairs Commission and the Financial Management Commission. (Note: The Party currently has 11 committees that review GVN activities, policy and personnel decisions. End Note.)

18. (C) Finally, Giang stated that KX-10 advised the Politburo that the role of national, provincial and district Party chiefs in policy formulation and implementation be decreased.

"The Party should not intervene in the implementation of policies by the government anymore," Giang said. KX 10 also recommended that the Party should allow more civil society organizations to form and set up a mechanism to foster the development of talented people, he added. Notably, on January 9, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Americas Department Director General Pham Van Que told the DCM that a focus of the upcoming Party Central Committee Plenum will be "interpreting and defining the role of the Party in the

context of Vietnam's changing circumstances as it increasingly integrates into the global community and continues its rapid economic development." Furthermore, in anticipation of this gathering, the Voice of Vietnam issued a statement on "democracy" calling for greater accountability among GVN and CPV officials.

Comment

19. (C) Even if the Politburo, Vietnam's top decision-making body, agreed with KX-10 that Party organizations should intervene less in policy, it is difficult to know how in practice this would play out. It is possible that the authority of line ministries could be strengthened if Party oversight diminished. While it is impossible to tell how influential KX-10 is, it is notable that top Party leaders have commissioned studies on and are perhaps even discussing political reform. The results of the upcoming Party plenum may provide greater insight into Party thinking in this regard. End Comment.

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